

## 'triptik/ by listlessness

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M, Freeform, Kinda, M/M, Multi, Polyamory, jonathan byers pov, slightly nsfw but not super obvs or anything, stoncy week 2018

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-07-25

**Updated:** 2018-07-25

**Packaged:** 2022-04-22 05:15:39

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 3,009

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

A set of three artistic works that belong together.

**Author's Note:**

This was originally written for day six of [Stoncy Week 2018](#) ('Against All Odds'), but as it progressed, I realised it suited day three a lot more ('Meant to Be'). This is a little experimental, but I had fun with it.

Nancy is all angles and sharp lines. She is built up on jagged points. Her hips jut out above her jeans, while her shoulder blades fan up and out like wings. The lines of her body are visible in the summer, under thin cotton dresses and tight shirts that collect sweat under her arms and at the small of her back. Her arms and legs knock together when she rubs up against them, her elbows digging into his ribs when she moves and slides in closer at night. Sometimes she lays back, drinking in the sun on hot days, clad in a bright orange bikini that shows off her ribs and complains about the heat. Jonathan can count them, his fingers dancing across her flank as she stretches her arms above her head and yawns. The tendons in her neck and armpits stretch and pulse as she kicks her feet back and forth into the pool as she gently nudges him away with a poke of her tongue.

Steve is the opposite. He's made of curves, from the slope of his shoulders as he shoves his hands deep into his pockets, all the way to the slouch in his back as he shrinks himself down to stand next to them. His hair is frizzy, and it curls when it's freshly washed and unstyled, free of hairspray, gel and whatever else he coats it with. His belly grows soft between different seasons of sport, while his shoulders become broad and thighs become defined by thick muscles as he runs along the court or between bases on the field. During the black of night, he wraps himself around Jonathan until he is bent into a soft U, Nancy at his back. His fingers dig into the mattress and his head tips back to reveal the bump in his throat that moves up and down as he shudders and sucks in air. In winter, he pile on jackets and sweaters, a scarf knotted elaborately around his neck until he is a ball made of navy blue.

Jonathan fits between them, built in a strange combination of angles

and curves. He burrows into the sharp lines of Nancy's body and coils in a small arc when Steve presses in behind him. There is a routine to how they move together, a precision to their shapes. His shoulders are a straight line that melt back and down, forming a dip in his back that extends out to the swell of his hips. As they lay in bed together, one either side of him, he finds his body melding in a way he has never experienced before. His hand fits in the valley of Nancy's waist, while the curvature of his spine fits Steve's stomach and chest. The shirts he wears accentuate the breadth of his shoulders in summer, until winter comes and his sweatshirts and hoodies fall over his bowed head, creating a series of mountainous slopes that mirror the hillside that borders Hawkins on the east. He is the planes of the desert, the valleys that lay between towns.

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Nancy is winter. Her hands are cold and turn blue when the temperature drops low. They each take a hand and hold them in close. She refuses to wear anything other than fingerless gloves, and Jonathan thinks she likes seeing them worry. Fog rolls into Hawkins every November, and she is drawn to it. They rein her in by the scarf that hangs around her neck. She picks snow up with her bare hands and crystals form in her hair. She shivers and burrows in close to them, with pale skin and purple lips, but never once complains about how cold it is. Instead, she wraps herself up in their coats and scarves, their shoes, five sizes too big and unlaced, on her feet. At school she's called the Ice Princess of Hawkins, with jeers and taunts thrown her way. She ignores them with a cool smile and a roll of her eyes. She's heard it all before, and it no longer gets under her skin. She's frozen everyone else out.

Steve is warm like summer. His skin is hot to touch. At night, he burns like a furnace, a limb tossed over both of them as he spreads himself out on the bed. There's no need for blankets when he's with them. He wakes with the sun as temperatures rise and spends every morning swimming laps. His skin turns a deep olive as he spends the day outside, somehow never burning. He strips and lazes by the pool, with no need to worry about tan lines. Affectionate and affable, he spreads smiles wherever he goes. Steve radiates warmth. Everyone is drawn to him. He attracts a crowd wherever he goes, making friends

that last for a season before the first brisk wind of fall sends him scuttling inside. Music follows him and he sings and dances, twirling Nancy and Jonathan under his arms. There's no escaping him when he smiles that brightly, beaming at the two of them as brightly as he does. He pulls them in and it's though the clouds part and summertime is caught between them.

Jonathan isn't winter or summer. Death follows the Byers like fall, but they are a family of rebirth like spring. He is cool like fall, with flashes of warmth like an Indian summer in spring. His moods come and go like fall winds and spring showers. It's impossible to gauge what any one day will bring. The slightest thing will set him off like an early frost, while all it takes is a murmur from Nancy or a hug from Steve and Jonathan spends to warm his heart and send him humming to himself for days like the first rosebud of spring. The chill of Nancy's icy personality is lessened around him, while Steve's utterly bright exuberance mellows out. In return, he pulls him in each direction. His sharp tongue delivers frosty remarks, his laughter spreading out around him as he smiles. He's pulled in both directions and connects their moods. He tampers their extremes, while they bring him out. Somehow, he smooths them all out.

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Nancy is as intangible as air. She moves fast and free. Her moods change as quickly as they come, blisteringly fast, blowing everyone away as she moves from one idea to the next. Her mind moves fast, not only with her emotions but her wit. During arguments with Steve (because she and Steve inevitably bicker), Nancy talks loud and fast, outspoken in her viewpoints. As they lay in bed together, she likes to wave her hands above her head and have her fingers dance about as she daydreams about college. At times it's hard for Jonathan to connect with her emotionally, her moods dictating her interests that dictate her connection to him. Like a gust of wind, she breezes in and out of their lives, refusing to be tied down. As quickly as she blows in, she's out the door again, having had her fill of their attention and touch, leaving their clothes an untidy mess, their lips kissed, their skin flushed, their hair windswept and blown back.

Steve burns like fire. Everything about him is passionate. People can't help but be drawn to him, to stand in his radiance and glory. His

charisma is intoxicating. Jonathan is pulled to him, his steady interest keeping Steve burning away. He runs hot, burning both of them when they sleep. It's impossible to not wake during the night when Steve's there, to feel stifled when his limbs lay across both of them. He grabs both of them, pulls them close, his mouth scalding them when they kiss. When they fuck, he feeds off their attention and throws it back at them threefold. They are engulfed in his fervour, his zest for life. It's all encompassing and burns strong. And just as Steve's passion burns bright, it causes him to be quick to anger. He becomes overworked quickly, ramping up until he's overwhelmed and storms out, leaving the ashes blowing behind in his wake. It takes days to dampen his moods until he's back at a mild simmer.

Jonathan is solid, grounded. He is earth. Stoic and still, he is the stabilising force out of the three of them. He draws Nancy back down when her anxieties sending her flying high, he buffers Steve's moods. When Nancy blusters and feeds Steve's burning anger, Jonathan is the one who stands between them. Overprotective and stubborn, he refuses to let them get the better of each other – or of him. He lets them rail against him, their hot and cold personalities crashing until they pull each other down on Jonathan. He holds them and steadies them, kissing each of them until the tornado of Nancy is nothing more than a breeze and Steve's raging fire is little more than kindling. He keeps them in line. They, too, help him grow. He blossoms between them, until he begins to shiver and quake. With each kiss and every uttered word, every sensual moan against his mouth, Jonathan feels himself expand and grow until he swears the bed is abloom underneath him.

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Nancy's moods come and go like the moon. She waxes and wanes routinely. She bores quickly, losing interest as she quickly moves through its phases. At school, she is close enough to admire, but mysterious and aloof. People wonder about her and marvel at her; they could reach her, if they try hard enough. Tides ripple from her, ebbing and flowing in her wake, but no one notices that they're caused by her at first, and she has no interest in seeing what comes up in her wake. She moves behind the scenes, pulling the truth from others, tugging strings that are invisible to everyone else. And, like

the moon, she reflects others onto her. Jonathan finds himself humming around her, tracing the lines of her pale skin in the black of night. She pulls the blankets up and around her, allows his oversized sweaters to swallow her whole, disappearing underneath them until there's nothing over her left to see.

Steve shines like the sun. He dazzles wherever he goes. With lusciously tanned skin and a bright smile, people are drawn to him, as though pulled in by gravity. Radiant and divine, he is the golden boy of Hawkins. He lights up the room wherever he goes, leaving people enamoured in his wake. The energy that Steve emits is exhausting, and those that spend too much time around him leave tired and wrung out. He is as dangerous as the sun; too close and others will get burnt. But, like the sun, he gives life. He makes Jonathan feel alive, he makes Nancy shine. Jonathan wants to dance because of him, sing because of him. Steve laughs loudly and he loves desperately. He seeks them out in the dark and the room comes to life in his arms. There's no escaping him and he pulls them out, shines the light on them and they soak in his glory for as long as they can.

Jonathan exists in their orbit. Nancy is safe to touch. She is closer, easier to hold onto. He follows her at school and reaches out. Some days, he finds their hands link and he can walk by her side. Other days, she slips through her grasp and disappears before he can keep her close. Steve is too far. He is dangerous and impossible to get close to in the public eye. But Jonathan chases after him, is drawn to him. Like Icarus before him, Jonathan dares to fly too close. He has the freedom to go between. Like a comet, he flits between, creating links where there once were none. He is the darkness they exist in. the liminality that binds the two. He is civil twilight, the period of exploration that occurs only in dusk and dawn. He is the clouds and the sky and the world that receives their beauty and elegance. They find one another because of him, the connecting force that drives them.

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Nancy never says *I love you*. The words remain frozen in her mouth. Instead, Jonathan tastes them. His tongue makes them melt, and he can swallow them whole. He chases them from her lips and finds

them embedded in Steve's skin from her kisses. They float in the coffee she makes them, between the mountains of frothed milk and caught between the dregs of coffee beans. They're caught between layers of sponge cake, the sweetness lingering on Jonathan's tongue afterwards. It's never more than a whisper, a suggestion, a flavour that adds spice and heightens everything else. Jonathan knows if he were to indulge entirely in it, it would be too strong, too overwhelming. It's better to only take what is offered, to let it wash over him in small amounts. They allow Nancy to give it when she wants to – to force her would be to make her shy away. It's just enough to tide him over, to keep him going until he can taste it again.

Steve repeats the words. It falls from his lips, again and again. He says it freely. Every encounter is followed by an utterance. They're like bubbles coming from his lips. Jonathan wonders if it's possible to dilute the meaning if the three words are said too much, but it never seems that way when it comes to Steve. Every whisper is like bubbles in a glass of champagne, every moaned word is an echo in Jonathan's mind. It's a fountain of admiration. It stains Jonathan's skin, tattooing him with intangible ideas and thoughts. Just when Jonathan thinks he can't take any more, Steve pushes on. It fills him. Jonathan hungers for it, he starves for it. Steve gives freely and often. It's the first thing he utters when he wakes up, the last thing that passes his lips before he falls into a fitful slumber. It's mouthed in his sleep, against the nape of Jonathan's neck, against the angle of Nancy's shoulder, forever and always.

Jonathan waits. He keeps the words close, afraid that it will always be the wrong moment. He presses his tongue to the roof of his mouth, feeling the vowels round on his tongue, the consonants sharp against the roof of his mouth. The moment has to be right. Sometimes he says it too quickly, and regret fills him. The words fall out just as another speaks, and the words are tossed aside into the ocean. Other times he's too late. They feel empty and hollow. He waited too long, the time has gone, he should have held back. But other times it's perfect. He catch Nancy by surprise, and he watches as a smile crawls over her face, softening her sharp features and causing her eyes to crinkle. It causes Steve to slow, and he slows to a simmer as he slides into Jonathan's arms and repeats the words back at him for the

hundredth time. Jonathan values their patience and their appreciation.

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Nancy twists, Steve turns and Jonathan tumbles. They come together impossibly, imperfectly. They have lost track of where one of them ends and the other begins. Their bodies slide against each other, naked skin and open mouths, hair getting lost in fingers and feet running up calves and shins. Under the cover of darkness, Jonathan loses track of time, and he begins to believe that, for them, it's never really existed. The hand on the small of his back is Steve's. This he knows, because of the heat that it emits. And there, an arm around his waist that belongs to Nancy. It chills him, soothing the ache in his muscles. Maybe Jonathan can't see them in the dark, but he knows their lines, he knows their shapes. He knows how to hold them, how to move between them. He doesn't need the light to know, when he fits between them so well, when he's always fit between them.

Nancy shivers, Steve trembles and Jonathan quivers. It's as though they have always been together. Whether this lifetime, the previous or the next. When he wakes in the morning, he knows if Nancy's going to be having a bad day based on the weather alone. By breakfast, he can sense in his bones if Steve is going to be wound up and looking for a fight. He knows the days when it's better to be gentle and to hold their hands under tables and press his foot against theirs. He knows the days when they need it rough, when it fuck instead of make love, when to push them to the edge. He knows this because he *is* them, *between* them, in the way no one else. Most of all, he knows how to bridge the gap between them, in a way they never could do themselves. Some days, he's certain he knows the two of them better than he knows himself.

Nancy yearns, Steve longs and Jonathan wishes. They wait to get out of Hawkins. They don't know how yet. They don't know when or why, but they will. They know this. Jonathan knows this, because it lives in his bones and exists in his heart. One day they will escape Hawkins and they will make a home for themselves elsewhere. They'll follow Nancy's moods to where she wants to go, and trace Steve's passions in the sky. The winters will be cold and the summers hot. Jonathan will keep them steady and focused. Until then, they'll



fall together in bed, their bodies locked as one. Jonathan swallows Nancy's sighs and he hungers for Steve's moans. Their hands grip together under tables, his left one hot and right one cold. They are imperfect and a little broken, but they have each other to hold themselves up against everything else. Nancy is their mind and Steve is their heart and Jonathan is their spine that unites them.